(d) and (e) The export of traditional items like tea, tobacco, and leather uppers to USSR has suffered in the last couple of years inter alia due to the financial problems faced by the Russian importers. During PMs visit to Moscow in June, 1994, it was agreed that a 3-year perspective plan could be chalked out for the import of traditional items, to ensure greater transparency, predictability and continuity in the off-take of these items.

India's trade with the former Soviet Republics

1825. SHRI GOVINDRAO ADIK: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether an expert study team had visited to Iran to help develop the transit route through Iran for India's trade with Central Asian Republics;

(b) if so, the outcome of the visit; and

(c) the usefulness and benefits that are to accrue from this route?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) An expert study team of Govt. officials visited Iran in July, 1993 to assess the feasibility of India's trade with the Central Asian Republics through Iran.

(b) and c) The findings of the team were that Iran has a fairly developed transport infrastructure and transit through Iran for Central Asian Republics is feasible both from the commercial and logistic points of view. The route through Iran holds the promise of being fast, smooth and more advantageous to the shippers.

Sri Lankan proposal for association of tea producers

1826. SHRI G. Y. KRISHNAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India has agreed to a Sri Lankan proposal to form an association of tea producers and establish a mechanism for the meaningful interaction on production, productivity and research as a result of the extensive talks held by the three member team headed by the Deputy Chairman on the Indian Tea Board with the Sri Lankan officials;

(b) if so, the joint marketing efforts discussed at this meet;

(c) the broad outlines for the formation of this association and the countries likely to join his tea producers' cartel; and

(d) how will it help India in boosting its tea exports and to ensure proper prices for south Indian tea producers?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) It has been decided in principle to join the proposed "Tea Producers' Association" mooted by Shri Lanka. This has been conveyed to Sri Lankan authorities.

(b) During the meeting of hte Indo-Sri Lanka Working Group, both delegations have agreed that any joint marketing venture should be between the private sectors of the two countries. The Tea Boards of both countries would lend their support for the same.

(c) The Association is proposed to be formed basically with a view to establish a mechanism for meanigful interaction amongst tea producing member countries on the production, productivity and research. However, broad aims and objectives of the association have not yet been finalised.

Positive responses are understood to have been received by Sri Lanka from tea producing countries. However, detailed information in this regard is not yet available.

(d) Since details of the objectives etc. of the proposed Tea Producers' Association have not been formulated as yet, it is too early to assess its impact on price stabilisation of Indian tea and improvement of Indian tea exports.